

Don Messer Legacy Lives On

Tourism, Culture and Heritage

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A new website developed by Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management is sure to be a big hit with Don Messer fans.

The virtual exhibit -- www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/virtual/messer -- showcases Don Messer and His Islanders as Canadians remember them best. It features sound and video clips, biographical information, listings for Mr. Messer's extensive sheet-music library, and a virtual exhibit that includes about 40 photographs.

The new site was developed using information from Mr. Messer's personal papers, donated to the archives by his daughter, Dawn Attis. Ms. Attis wanted her father's unique contribution to Canadian music to be preserved and remembered and is pleased that a new generation of people interested in traditional music can now experience Don Messer and His Islanders.

"My father died in 1973, long before the Internet was heard of," said Ms. Attis. "He would be pleased that his music still has such appeal, and amazed that people everywhere will now be able to learn about his career, thanks to the website. It's one of the best ways to keep his legacy alive."

If Don Messer were alive today, he'd be 95. Born in May 1909, the Tweedside, N.B., musician became nationally famous as a professional fiddler, band leader, music writer and popular entertainer. His career spanned four decades.

The program Don Messer and His Islanders was as big as it got in the early days of Canadian radio and television. Across the country, tens of thousands of people listened three times a week, between 1944 and 1958, as Mr. Messer's program was broadcast live from Charlottetown, P.E.I. on CBC Radio.

With the advent of television, thousands more watched Don Messer's Jubilee each week, from 1959 to 1969. The program was produced by CBC Television in Halifax. It was cancelled in 1969 and even now, 35 years later, some people still miss it.

Mr. Messer's infectious brand of toe-tapping down-home music demonstrated the best in the musical tradition of rural North America. His personal papers, assembled over 70 years, document his career and contribution to the Canadian music industry.

The new virtual exhibit will be available indefinitely on the archives' website.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

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